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ABSTRACT

This study examined teaching interactions of single adolescent and young adult mothers during a structured teaching task with their infants. A total of 25 adolescent and 25 adult single mothers were videotaped during 4-minute teaching sessions with their 4-month-old infants in their homes. Investigators rated maternal teaching strategies and the affective climate provided by mothers during the teaching task. Mothers also completed questionnaires that included measures of locus of control, child rearing beliefs, perceived influence on child outcomes, and a positive outlook for their child's future. Results suggested that adolescent and adult mothers who felt that their lives were controlled by external factors or who held authoritarian beliefs about parenting performed less well while teaching their infants than did mothers who held less authoritarian beliefs about parenting. Perceived parental influence on child outcomes correlated positively with teaching interactions in both groups. Regression analyses indicated that belief in chance occurences and perceived parental influence on child outcomes were the best predictors of teaching interactions among adolescents. Authoritarian beliefs about parenting were the best predictor of teaching interactions among adults. (RH)

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RELATIONS BETWEEN TEACHING BEHAVIORS AND MATERNAL BELIEFS IN ADOLESCENT AND YOUNG ADULT MOTHERS

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ABSTRACT

This study examines teaching interactions of single adolescent and young adult mothers during a structured teaching task with their four-month-old infants. Correlations were used to examine relations between teaching interactions and maternal beliefs. Regression analyses were used to assess the influence of maternal beliefs on teaching interactions.

Twenty-five adolescent and 25 adult single mothers were videotaped during four-minute teaching sessions in their homes. Ratings were made of maternal teaching strategies and of the affective climate provided by these mothers during the teaching task. Mothers also completed questionnaires that included measures of locus of control, child-rearing beliefs, perceived influence on child outcomes, and a positive outlook for their child's future.

Results suggested that adolescent and adult mothers who felt their lives were controlled by external factors and who held authoritarian beliefs about parenting performed less well teaching their infants than mothers who held less authoritarian beliefs about parenting. Perceived parental influence on child outcomes was positively related to teaching interactions in both groups. Regression analyses indicated that belief in chance occurances and perceived parental influence on child outcomes were the best predictors of teaching interactions among adolescents, whereas authoritarian beliefs about parenting were the best predictor of teaching interactions among adults.

Interest in Vygotsky's theory of social support for cognitive development has renewed research efforts assessing maternal teaching and its influence on child outcomes. Research suggesting that adolescents perform less well in the parenting role than their adult counterparts, together with findings indicating that children of adolescent parents perform less well academically, suggests the need for research examining the particular strategies adolescents use when teaching their children. This study examines the teaching behaviors of single adolescent and young adult mothers during a structured teaching task. Young adult mothers were chosen as a comparison group in order to assess age as a determinant of maternal behaviors. Relations between teaching interactions and maternal beliefs were examined. Regression analyses were used to assess the influence of various maternal beliefs on teaching interactions.

Twenty-five adolescent and 25 adult single mothers were seen in their homes when their infants were four months old. Adolescent mothers ranged in age from 16 to 18 years ($\underline{M}$=17.8); adult mothers ranged in age from 20 to 24 years ($\underline{M}$=22.2). There were no significant differences in socioeconomic status based on the social status indices of the mothers' mothers (Hollingshead, 1978). The mothers were largely from lower SES levels (See Tables 1-2).

Mother-infant dyads were videotaped during a four-minute teaching session using a colorful "Busy Choo-Choo" train. Mothers were told: "We are interested in how babies learn and how mothers teach. See what you can teach your baby to do with this toy." Mothers also completed Levenson's Locus Of Control (LOC) scale (1975) and an adapted version of Luster's (1986) Parent Opinion Survey (POS). The LOC is a six-point scale that includes one internal LOC subscale and two external LOC subscales (chance and powerful others). The POS is a six-point scale that includes three subscales: authoritarian beliefs about parenting, positive outlook,

and perceived parental influence on child outcomes. T-tests revealed only one significant difference between the groups on maternal belief measures: Adolescent mothers were likely to hold more positive outlooks for their childen's future than were adult mothers ($\underline{M}$ = 2.6 for adolescents; $\underline{M}$ = 2.2 for adults, $p<.05$). Positive outlook appeared to be positively related to the adolescents' living at home with their own mothers ($r = .44$, $p < .05$).

Videotapes were coded for teaching interactions and affective climate using a nine-point rating scale. Teaching interactions were broken into two components: maternal teaching strategies and affective climate. Maternal teaching strategies included subscales on effort, variety and complexity of strategies, and quality; affective climate subscales included positive affect, absence of negative affect, and the provision of a positive learning environment. No significant differences were found between groups on maternal teaching strategies or on affective climate.

Correlational analyses were used to examine relations between maternal belief measures and teaching interactions. For adolescent and adult mothers, both external locus of control subscales (chance and powerful others) were negatively related to teaching interactions. In addition, more authoritarian beliefs about parenting and less perceived influence on child outcome were significantly associated with less optimum maternal teaching interactions. Specifically, within the adolescent group, the chance subscale related negatively to effort, variety and complexity of strategies and provision of a positive learning environment. The powerful others subscale related negatively to absence of negative affect. That is, adolescents who held beliefs in powerful others were more likely to use more negative behaviors and affect with their infants. Authoritarian beliefs about parenting related negatively to effort and to provision of a learning environment. Perceived parental influence on child outcomes related positively to effort, variety

and complexity of strategies, absence of negative affect, and provision of a positive learning environment.

Within the adult group, beliefs in chance occurrances related negatively to effort and quality of teaching strategies and beliefs in powerful others related negatively to effort, positive affect, and provision of a positive learning environment. Authoritarian beliefs related negatively to effort, quality of teaching, and positive affect. That is, adult mothers who held more authoritarian beliefs about parenting were likely to put forth less effort during the teaching episode, use more inappropriate and poorer quality teaching strategies, and show less warmth, praise and encouragement and sensitive responsivity toward their infants than were mothers who held less authoritarian beliefs. Perceived parental influence on child outcomes related positively to absence of negative affect.

Two stepwise multiple regression analyses were performed for each group, with maternal teaching strategies and affective climate as dependent variables. For each analysis, the six belief subscales were entered as predictor variables. Results indicated that in the adolescent group belief in chance was the single best predictor of maternal teaching strategies, $F(1, 23) = 4.63$, $p < .05$, and parental influence was the single best predictor of affective climate, $F(1, 23) = 8.39$, $p < .01$. In the adult group, the authoritarian beliefs subscale was the single best predictor of teaching strategies, $F(1, 23) = 8.23$, $p < .01$, and of affective climate, $F(1, 23) = 9.47$, $p < .01$.

These results suggest that mothers who feel their lives are controlled by external factors and who hold authoritarian beliefs about parenting perform less well in teaching their infants. In addition, adolescent and adult mothers differ in the beliefs that appear to affect their teaching interactions with their infants. Since factors other than age may be contributing to the parenting skills of young mothers, additional research is necessary to increase our understanding of other possible predictors of maternal teaching behavior.

Table 1. **Description of Mothers**

	Adolescents (N = 25)		Adults (N = 25)	
	Mean	Range	Mean	Range
Mothers				
Age	17.8	16-18	22.2	20-24
SES*	1.9	1-4	2.0	1-4
Fathers				
Age	19.1	16-25	26.1	20-43
SES	1.5	1-3	2.4	1-5

*Based on Hollingshead (1978) Social Status Indices of their mothers.

Table 2. **Description of Living Situations**

Number of Mothers:	Adolescents	Adults
Attending School	16	3
Working	13	14
Living with their mothers	10	1
Living with infant's father	11	9
Receiving public assistance	12	16

Table 3. **Correlations Between Adolescent Teaching Interactions and Beliefs**

	Teaching Strategies			Affective Climate		
	Effort	Strategies	Quality	Pos. Affect	Absence of Neg. Affect	Pos. Learn Envir.
Maternal Beliefs (Luster)						
Positive Outlook	.12	.21	-.23	.03	.01	.12
Authoritarian	-.41*	-.32	-.23	-.34	-.18	-.42*
Parental Influence	.42*	.45*	.09	.36+	.55**	.40*
Locus of Control (Levenson)						
Internal	.08	.12	.00	-.06	-.19	-.17
Chance	-.51**	-.53**	.12	-.49*	-.23	-.58**
Power	-.23	-.32	-.02	-.32	-.40*	.34

+p<.10
*p<.05
**p<.01

Table 4. **Correlations Between Adult Teaching Interactions and Beliefs**

	Teaching Strategies			Affective Climate		
	Effort	Strategies	Quality	Pos. Affect	Absence of Neg. Affect	Pos. Learn Envir.
Maternal Beliefs (Luster)						
Positive Outlook	.03	-.23	.30	.19	-.01	-.09
Authoritarian	-.51**	.03	-.44*	-.47*	-.37+	-.29
Parental Influence	.32	-.04	.16	.20	.40*	.14
Locus of Control (Levenson)						
Internal	.05	.13	.19	-.08	-.05	.05
Chance	-.44*	-.03	-.40*	-.38+	-.21	-.34
Power	-.50*	-.24	-.24	-.46*	-.05	-.55**

+p<.10
*p<.05
**p<.01